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Exonyms

The endonym/exonym divide — questions resolved and still open at the fifteenth anniversary of the Working Group on Exonyms

Summary**

On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Working Group on Exonyms, the report highlights achievements of the Working Group as well as questions still open. The achievements include the series of workshops held on the margins of the sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and United Nations conferences, at which about 30 participants from up to 20 countries always participated, and which functioned as forums for serious discussions on the endonym/exonym divide and criteria for the use of exonyms. Ten workshops of this kind were organized from 2003 to 2017 in various places. What provided these workshops with special added value was the participation not only of scientists, but also of former experts from the Group of Experts, who had ceased to be delegates of their countries to sessions of the Group, but improved the events with their valuable experience and expertise. Another achievement is very likely the series of proceedings emanating from the workshops and the precise documentation of discussions and findings. These achievements compensate in part the lack of results in terms of resolutions, recommendations and guidelines — the conventional "products" of the Group of Experts and its working groups. Indeed, the only outcome of the Working Group in this conventional respect are the new definitions of endonym and exonym, as documented in the amended version of the Group of Experts glossary of terms. While the new definitions avoid the shortcomings of their predecessors as to overlap, they were again soon criticized for being unpractical for purposes of standardization.

The report addresses the following questions that still need to be resolved:

- Do place names differ from the official names only by the omission, addition or alteration of diacritics or the article? Do they differ from the official names only by declension or derivation? Are they created by the translation only of

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** The full report was prepared by Peter Jordan (Austria), Convenor, Working Group on Exonyms, and is available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf11.html, in the language of submission only, as document E/CONF.105/17/CRP.17.

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the generic term to be regarded as exonyms?

- Does phonetical transcription create exonyms?
- Can the endonym/exonym divide be confined to the written form of the name?
- Is there need for an additional term for sea names?
- Is the endonym/exonym divide solely defined by the spatial/territorial relation between the community using the name and the feature marked by this name?
- Where does a community's own territory end when the endonym is defined as the name attributed to features on a community's own territory?
- What is an indigenous community? For how many generations must it be present in its current homeland to qualify as indigenous?
- How can exonyms be categorized? Various aspects may be relevant, for example, the feature category, semantics, linguistic configuration and the relation to the endonym.